

Let workers join the union of their choice

THE Western Cape region of the Media Workers Association of South Africa (MWASA) decided at its first annual congress to work toward closer ties with all democratic trade unions.

To put this ideal into practice, the union decided to actively support the Cape Town Solidarity Committee of independent trade unions and also to urge other branches to support the committee in their regions.

The congress, held at the Lutheran centre in Athlone on March 13 and 14, was attended by representatives of other democratic unions, community organisations and members of the union.

Union officials were however disappointed at the small number of workers who attended the congress. This was in spite of the union having increased its membership from 40 to 500 in less than a year.

It was felt that too many workers did not fully understand that they formed the union and that their active support was essential.

Officials urged members to get involved in the union. As one official said: "No issue is too complicated for all the workers to discuss. Discussion must take place inside and outside meetings, at home and at work."

"Workers must realise that important policy decisions are taken at congress which decides the future of the union."

In his report, the outgoing chairman of the region said he was proud that "MWASA Western Cape has taken its place among democratic civic, community and

trade union organisations in the Western Cape."

He said the union had ensured democratic consultation with workers on all issues through the holding of monthly meetings and the referring of issues to workers' for decisions.

The outgoing secretary reported that two petitions demanding the right of workers to join the union of their choice was being circulated at the Argus newspaper.

An important section dealt with the difficulties experienced in recognition negotiations with the management of Allied Publishing which refused to negotiate with MWASA for higher wages or better working con-

ditions.

Workers at Allied had decided to petition management to give in to their demands.

Features of the second day of congress were papers dealing with the union's community involvement, its relations with other unions and greater participation of ordinary members.

These papers were well received and were discussed at length, with the guest speakers answering questions from members.

Officials elected at the congress were Mr H Pick - chairman, Mr A Salie - secretary, Mr R Woolfe - treasurer, and Ms A Boonsaier - assistant secretary-treasurer.

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ported that two petitions demanding the right of workers to join the union of their choice was being circulated at the Argus newspaper.

This was because many workers are members of MWASA as well as being forced to belong to the South African Typographical Union (SATU) which has a closed shop agreement with Argus management.

In spite of this, Argus management was forced to call in MWASA officials to settle a two-hour strike by circulation workers, many of whom were also SATU members.

Describing the strike as a "significant development", the secretary reported that the union had forced management to submit to the workers demands and the strike was called off.

The organisers report dealt thoroughly with all aspects of the union and traced its development up to the present.

BUYING CLUBS CAN CUT COSTS

ON the outskirts of the mission station, Genadendal, near Caledon, lie three villages where farm workers live.

The villages - Bosmanskloof, Bereasville and Voorstekraal - have been in existence for more than 200 years but still there are no shops serving the community.

Faced with the high cost of living, people have in the last few years found it increasingly difficult to feed their families.

In response to this problem, a few Bosmanskloof women, assisted by a community worker, decided to do their buying together.

Through discussing their plan with others, they managed to get together about 17 women to form a buying club. Not long afterwards, clubs were formed in Berea and Voorstekraal.

At present, the combined membership of the three clubs is more

than 200 households.

Members say that the three clubs have grown, because they proved to be a solution to the people's problems.

But it was the basic trust shared by the members that has ensured the success of the clubs, they say.

In an interview with the community worker in the area, GRASSROOTS learnt how these clubs were run.

She told us that all three clubs were run along the same lines.

"The members discuss which goods are needed. These are then



purchased in bulk at wholesalers in Cape Town and delivered to particular houses. The people then send in their orders - a small group is chosen to pack.

These orders can be collected on Friday night or Saturday morning while items required urgently can be obtained during the week at prescribed times.

To avoid congestion, people are asked to enter at the back door and leave through the

front door.

"At the present moment, the club is experiencing a problem because many workers are seasonal workers on the fruit and other farms. They therefore have to send in their orders early in the week and are not available to assist with packing.

Discuss

But it is no longer essential to have meetings once a week because after nearly a year, we have a very good idea of the amount of goods we must order.

We therefore have meetings once a month where we discuss what goods to buy, what problems we have and other matters arising in the community.

At such a general meeting, a chairperson, vice-chairperson, secretary, assistant secretary, cashier and other committee members are chosen. Their duty is to see to it that everything runs smoothly.

A Voorstekraal resident Mrs R J Edson, told GRASSROOTS how she became involved in the struggle

against attempts to stop the clubs from working.

"The problems started when the management board of Genadendal got to know about the clubs.

"They were not pleased and sent us a letter asking us to stop running the club until they could investigate the manner in which the club operated.

But we did not stop because we needed the club.

Instead, we together with the club in Bereasville sent an invitation to the management board to attend a combined meeting of the two clubs where the matter can be discussed. (Bereasville is even further from the shops - four miles.)

More than a hundred members gathered to wait for the board but not one board member arrived.

Later, the board invited the community worker to come and hold talks with them.

"He refused and instead went along with a numbers of other mem-

bers to put the case for the clubs. When the board said the clubs are not allowed, the people said they were going to continue.

Because the board saw that the people were determined, they had to agree that the clubs could continue to operate.

They said however that they would expect certain questions to be answered in writing. This was agreed upon and this was done but so far the promised written permission has not been received.

"In Voorstekraal, our club has been in operation for ten months now and we are happy to say that all but two of the households belong to the club," Mrs Edson said.

Savings

The club means good savings on each item which is a great help financially. Another advantage is that even a four year old can be sent to fetch the goods without interference."

Long live the Voorstekraal Savings Club the residents say.

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